[b-greek] Re: Aorist Tense

From: Carl W. Conrad (*cwconrad@artsci.wustl.edu*)
Date: Thu Nov 16 2000 - 09:19:06 EST

- **Next message:** Carl W. Conrad: "[b-greek] Re: Aorist Tense (correction)"
- **Previous message:** Wieland Willker: "[b-greek] Pocket GNT"
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At 2:25 AM -0600 11/16/00, RUSSELL RANKIN wrote:
>RE: Aorist Tense in Koine New Testament Greek
>
>To what extent is the time of the Aorist definitely past?

The INDICATIVE aorist is far more often than not referring to the past event, but there are situations wherein it may refer to the present or even to the future. Still, as a rule of thumb, one may pretty well generally assume that anm aorist indicative refers to a past event or situation.

>To what extent is the action definite or indefinite?

I'm not sure what you mean. The name itself "aorist" means "indefinite" but an aorist indicative may refer to a particular event or situation, and yet it may refer to something that has happened in the past and happens repeatedly (gnomic aorist). But by "indefinite" I think that what is usually meant is that nothing very specific about the manner of the action is indicated, but first and foremost the simple fact of the action.

>Is the Aorist an ambiguous tense that cannot be rendered accurately because
>it is so indefinite in time?

Not really; as I've said, the indicative aorist usually does refer to the past; it bears an augment regularly and that is generally said to be an indicator of past time on an indicative verb. Where there may be ambiguity is with an aorist in one of the non-finite moods: infinitive, participle, subjunctive, optative, imperative. And even there, one can learn to make appropriate distinctions in context.

>Is there any essential difference between the Aorist verb and the Aorist
>participle in regard to past time?

If by "the Aorist verb" you mean an aorist indicative, then I would answer NO: the aorist participle generally tends to refer to action or situation anterior to the action or situation of the verb on which it depends--just as the aorist indicative TENDS to represent action anterior to present time, or if dependent on another past tense verb, anterior to that time (= pluperfect). Yet the aorist participle may refer to a future event that must take place before the action of a verb upon which it is dependent, as TOUTWN GENOMENWN, EIRHNHN OYOMEQA, "When these things have taken place, we shall see peace." In that sentence TOUTWN GENOMENWN must pretty much refer to events that haven't taken place at the time of the statement.

This is asking too many questions about a complex subject as if each could be answered rather simply--that may not have been the intent. But you must be aware even from citing Goodwin's classic reference of over a century ago, that matters are not really at all simple.

>Please expand on this quote from Syntax of The Moods and Tenses of the Greek
>Verb [William W. Goodwin, 1888]:
>
> "The Aorist Indicative expresses the simple momentary occurence of an
>action in past time....
> "This fundamental idea of simple occurence remains the essential
>characteristic of the Aorist through all the dependent moods, however
>indefinite they may be in regard to time."
>
>My questions were prompted by the following response in a discussion of
>Colossians 1:23.
>>>
>In Col. 1:23 Paul uses the Aorist Passive Participle, 'keruchthentos'
>("proclaim"). The Aorist tense says nothing about the state of
>the action whether complete or in process. The Aorist only
>sees the action as a whole but without reference to the state of
>the action and is thus defined by some grammarians as an
>'indefinite' tense. An Aorist Participle says nothing about the
>time of action. It could be in the past or simultaneous with
>the speaker. The Aorist Participle is notoriously difficult to
>render accurately in English. It could be rendered, "having
>been preached," but that English rendering implies a state of
>completion that the Aorist Participle does not. Or it could be,
>"being preached" but that implies action in progress which the
>Aorist also does not but probably comes closest to Paul's
>point. As in the previous point this could only be taken to

>indicate the process was complete if Paul had used a Perfect
>or Pluperfect tense.

Text EI GE EPIMENETE THi PISTEI TEQEMILIWMENOI KAI hEDRAIOI KAI MH METAKINOUMENOI APO THS ELPIDOS TOU EUAGGELIOU hOU HKOUSATE, TOU KHRUCQENTOS
EN PASHi KTISEI THi hUPO TON OURANON, hOU EGENOMHN EGW PAULOS DIAKONOS.

Inasmuch as KHRUCQENTOS here refers to TOU EUAGGELIOU and is further qualified by the adverbial phrase EN PASHi KTISEI THi hUPO ;TON OURANON, I would certainly assume that the author intended it to be understood as a past event; I'd even say that in this context it probably ought to be conveyed by a present perfect: "... the gospel that has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven ..." I think that the author's assumption is that the gospel has already been proclaimed throughout the inhabited world; we might dispute the historical assertion, but I think it's probably meant to refer to something that's already happened.

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